

(Washington, D.C.) - U.S. Representative Chet Edwards today joined U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki to announce that the Waco VA hospital will open a National Pharmacy Contact Center in Waco that will create 224 new full and part-time jobs in the local economy by 2010. Edwards gave the following remarks prepared for delivery:

Good morning. Not long ago, I invited VA Secretary Shinseki to visit the Waco VA Medical Center to see the great work being done here for thousands of deserving veterans. I am thrilled that he accepted my invitation and this morning has visited first-hand with staff and veterans here.

That alone would have been reason to celebrate, especially since I consider him to be one of the finest public servants I have ever known. He personifies the highest ideals of integrity in public service-from his distinguished service in Viet Nam to his command of the First Cavalry Division at Ft. Hood to his service as Commanding General of the U.S. Army to his strong leadership as VA Secretary in behalf of all of America's veterans. Secretary Shinseki, welcome back to Central Texas.

Yet, there is another reason to celebrate Secretary Shinseki's visit here.

We are here to announce that the VA is opening a National Pharmacy Contact Center, which will employ 224 people at the Waco VA Medical Center campus.

The Center will improve pharmacy care for veterans across the country by providing answers to key questions about medications, whether those questions come from individual veterans or from VA pharmacies in 7 of the 21 VA VISNS (regions).

By centralizing its pharmacy expertise in Waco, the VA can provide better health care to veterans at a savings to taxpayers. That's a win-win.

This important announcement is an exclamation point for the future of the Waco VA Medical Center. It is a clear statement that the Department of Veterans Affairs sees the Waco VA as a vital resource for veterans throughout Texas and across the nation.

The National Pharmacy Contact Center brings us one step closer to realizing the dream of those of us who fought so hard to keep the Waco VA open-the dream that this campus one day be fully utilized for the benefit of America's veterans.

I believe that dream is coming to reality far faster than any of us might have imagined just a year or two ago.

I salute Secretary Shinseki for making the decision to open a National Pharmacy Contact Center and to locate it here in Waco.

By selecting Waco, the VA takes advantage of an existing VA facility and a community that has

proven for over 70 years its deep commitment to caring for veterans.

Let me add, that during a national recession, creating 224 new jobs in Waco is great news for our economy and families in Central Texas. Better yet, this will happen fairly quickly. The contract for the \$4.5 million renovation of Building 90 will be let in September, next month. The first administrative staff of 8-10 people will begin work in less than three months; the training for the next 16 workers will begin in December of this year; and all 224 new employees will be hired by October of 2010. By government or private sector standards, that is moving expeditiously. For the record, this will total more than 400 new jobs at the Waco VA since January of 2007, and that is not counting the jobs created by over \$60 million in new construction here.

And, also, if the pharmacy program works well, who knows, there might be potential to grow the program and the jobs it provides here in Waco.

Secretary Shinseki, welcome back to Central Texas and thank you for your tremendous, lifelong service to our great nation.

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison could not be here today, because of a previous commitment, but she has always been there when it has really counted for the Waco VA and the veterans it serves.

I know you will all join me in our gratitude to Senator Hutchison for the critical role she has played in saving and now growing the Waco VA Medical Center. I am deeply grateful for all she has done, including her support for this Pharmacy Contact Center. Please welcome, in behalf of Senator Hutchison, Nick Schroeder.

In addition to Secretary Shinseki and Senator Hutchison, I would like to thank several others. VA Assistant Secretary Joan Evans, I want to welcome you to Waco and thank you for your work in Congressional and Legislative Affairs. To VISN 17 Director Tim Shea, in addition to all of the many other things you do so well for our Texas veterans, thank you for the key role you have played in this process. To Tom Smith and to Tom Balderach, thank you for your dedicated leadership for the Central Texas VA Health Care System and the Waco VA. Let me also thank every VA employee at the Waco VA. Your commitment to our veterans over the years is a key reason why the Waco VA is open today.

Mayor DuPuy, Chamber Executive Jim Vaughn and to Waco's veterans, thank you for your key partnership in support of the Waco VA.

I am proud that my hometown is once again partnering with the VA to provide quality health care for America's heroes.

Edwards is the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction & Veterans Affairs

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